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Impression (mis)management when communicating success

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Abstract

People routinely engage in impression management, for example by highlighting successes. What is not yet known is how people attribute their success (to talent versus effort) to give a positive impression. Three experiments explore this question and test whether people's attributions of success receive favor from their audience. The findings show that, in impression management situations (e.g., job interview or date), people communicate their effort less than audiences would prefer. Thus, success alone may not be enough to make a positive impression on others; emphasizing effort as the cause for success also matters.

Keywords: person perception; impression management; communication of success; self-presentation

Impression (mis)management when communicating success

People routinely engage in impression management (Jones & Pittman, 1982), as successfully portraying oneself in a positive light promises interpersonal and professional success (Leary, 1995; Le Barbanchon, Milhabet, Steiner, & Priolo, 2008). One pervasive strategy of impression management is self-promotion, which means to emphasize one's successes and accomplishments (Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley, & Gilstrap, 2008; Bolino & Turnley, 1999; Sedikides, Gregg, & Hart, 2007). For example, people use their successes to self-promote in job interviews, as the appropriate use of such self-promotion can increase their chances to receive job offers (Roulin, Bangerter, & Levashina, 2014; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). However, a success story is hardly complete or convincing without an explanation for the success: Did the success come easy, thanks to one's talents, or was it effortfully attained through hard work? Both of these attributions can be part of successful self-promotion (Bolino & Turnley, 1999), but which attribution is more likely to garner favorable impressions? I investigate to which causes people attribute their success in different impression management situations, and whether these attributions are calibrated toward making positive impressions on audiences.

Research on person perception suggests that success alone may not be enough to warrant social favor; *how* people succeed also matters. People who succeed through hard work and effort are liked by others (Kruger, Wirtz, Van Boven, & Altermatt, 2004; Vandello, Goldschmied, & Richards, 2007; Weiner & Kukla, 1970). However, people value the work of those who succeed thanks to their natural talent more than the work of hard-working strivers (Tormala, Jia, & Norton, 2012; Tsay, 2015; Tsay & Banaji, 2011). Thus, success due to effort versus talent might evoke distinct forms of (positive) evaluations: Being liked more for one's effort, but perceived as more competent for one's talent. The previous literature has only implied but not directly tested the relation between effort and likeability/warmth on the one

hand and talent and competence on the other hand. To provide a direct empirical basis for this important part of my hypothesis, I test this relation in a pilot experiment (see The Current Research).

When different attributions of success evoke different interpersonal perceptions, should people attribute their success to effort or to talent to effectively self-promote? Because interpersonal warmth is thought to be one of the primary dimensions of person perception (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008), even the most competent fail to earn favor without seeming somewhat warm (Cardy & Dobbins, 1986; Casciaro & Lobo, 2008). Therefore, people should convey their efforts when talking about successes. However, self-promotion is used to convey one's competence (Bolino & Turnley, 1999; Sedikides et al., 2007), and it might seem most compelling to do so by conveying one's talent (Tormala et al., 2012; Tsay, 2015; Tsay & Banaji, 2011). If different qualities are implied by different attributions, the question arises how people solve the task of communicating their success, and, critically, whether they are successful at conveying a positive impression.

One possibility is that people accurately anticipate when to emphasize effort and when to emphasize talent in order to make a positive impression on their audience. However, people often choose suboptimal impression management strategies because they miscalculate their audience's reactions to their self-presentation (Scopelliti, Vosgerau, & Loewenstein, 2015; Sezer, Gino, & Norton, 2018; Steinmetz, Sezer, & Sedikides, 2017). Thus, I expect that people fail to accurately predict which attribution receives favor from their audience. More specifically, I expect that people underestimate their audience's preference for hearing about effort. Research has shown that people evaluate themselves primarily based on their agency/competence-related qualities (Wojciszke & Abele, 2008). When trying to gauge what the audience would like to hear, people might project these competence-based evaluations onto others (Scopelliti et al., 2015), and might thus broadcast their talent, as was found in the

self-promotion literature (Bolino & Turnley, 1999). In contrast, people evaluate others primarily based on communion/warmth-related qualities (Cuddy et al., 2008; Wojciszke & Abele, 2008) and generally prefer those who seem warm (Cottrell, Neuberg, & Li, 2007). Consequently, audiences might prefer to hear also about effort from others, because effort conveys warmth and relatability (Klein & O'Brien, 2017). However, impression managers might fail to anticipate this preference for effort because of their competence-focused self-evaluation. When people then project their competence-based self-evaluations, they might correctly anticipate the audience's reaction to talent and resulting competence, but might neglect its preferences for effort and resulting warmth. Thus, people might emphasize their efforts too little when communicating their success.

The Current Research

In a pilot experiment, I explored whether effortful success through hard work conveys more warmth and less competence than effortless success through talent. Although this notion has been implied by previous literature (Tsay, 2015; Vandello et al., 2007), a direct test has been lacking of the interpersonal perception of successful people whose success has different causes. If different causes for success entail different interpersonal perceptions, the causes for success should be taken into account for self-promotion.

For the pilot experiment, I recruited 121 US-based Amazon MTurk participants ($M_{age} = 33.98$, $SD_{age} = 10.20$; 36% female) to read about a target person named Dan, who was very successful at pursuing his goals. Participants were randomly assigned to the effortful [effortless] condition and further read: "*And here's the thing about Dan: he finds it really hard [easy] to be successful. He needs to [doesn't need to] struggle and expend much [any] effort, in order to succeed. He sticks to his goals perfectly because he tries hard [without trying at all].*" Then, participants rated how competent, capable, efficient, skillful, confident, and intelligent Dan seemed (competence: $\alpha = .86$), and how warm, well intentioned,

trustworthy, and sincere (warmth: $\alpha = .87$), from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*).

Supporting the hypothesis, effortless success ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 0.57$) conveyed more competence than effortful success ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 0.63$), producing a medium effect ($d = 0.65$)¹. In contrast, effortful success conveyed more warmth ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 0.63$) than effortless success ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.83$), producing a medium effect ($d = 0.53$). Note that both types of success conveyed more competence than warmth (effortless: $d_{RepeatedMeasures} = 1.63$; effortful: $d_{RepeatedMeasures} = 0.32$), presumably because success per se signaled some competence. Importantly, effortful success increase people's perceived warmth and decreases competence, compared to effortless success.

Building on these findings, three experiments explore to which causes people attribute their successes in impression management situations. In these experiments, people imagine themselves in a job interview (Experiments 1 and 3) versus on a date (Experiment 2) to elicit self-presentational goals (Le Barbanchon, Milhabet, & Bry, 2016). I then test whether people's attributions of success to effort versus talent are calibrated toward the preferences of their audience. Note that in the pilot experiment, success originates from *either* talent *or* effort. In Experiments 1-3, I measure on separate items whether people attribute their success to talent and effort, to test whether people emphasize both causes of success to the extent that the audience prefers.

For all experiments, I predetermined sample sizes of $N = 100$ per experimental condition (similar to Sezer et al., 2018). All measures and manipulations are reported. No data were excluded in any of the experiments. See <https://tinyurl.com/success-upload> for all data and materials.

Experiment 1

¹ Consistent with Cohen (1988), I define effect sizes of $d = 0.20$, $\eta^2 = .02$, $B = 0.10$, and $r = .10$ as small; $d = 0.50$, $\eta^2 = .08$, $B = 0.30$, and $r = .30$ as medium; and $d = 0.80$, $\eta^2 = .16$, $B = 0.50$, and $r = .50$ as large.

Method

Participants. I randomly assigned 200 Dutch undergraduate student participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 20.69$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 2.81$; 45% female) to a one-factor (role: sharer versus receiver) between-subjects design. Participants responded to the questions on paper, and received a small candy bar as compensation.

Procedure. Participants were asked to imagine being in a job interview. Whereas such settings might particularly evoke the goal to appear competent (Le Barbanchon et al., 2016), the audience likely still values warmth also in professional contexts (Cann, 2004). However, people might show miscalibration to the audience's perspective, and might not emphasize their effort enough to convey warmth. To test this hypothesis, participants were randomly assigned to the role of the *sharer* (interviewee) versus the *receiver* (interviewer). To increase participants' engagement with the task, sharers were first asked to write for a few minutes about what they would talk about in general to maximize their chances of getting the job, without any reference to effort versus talent. Similarly, receivers were asked to write about what the interviewee should in general talk about to maximize their chances of getting the job.

Next, *sharers* were asked to imagine that the interviewer asks them to share a story about a personal or professional success. These participants were asked: "*What would be your strategy for how to share and describe this success, in a way that would make them think very positively about you? Would you talk about the work and effort you are putting into reaching your goals? Would you mention the struggles you've experienced? Or, would you rather come across as a natural succeder, as someone who just easily succeeds without having to try? Would you mention your talent and natural ability?*" Sharers indicated their strategy on two separate items, "*I would mention my struggles and efforts*" (1 = *definitely not*, 7 = *definitely yes*), and "*I would mention my talent and abilities*" (1 = *definitely not*, 7 =

definitely yes).

Receivers were asked to imagine that they had asked the interviewee to share a story about a personal or professional success. These participants read: “*How would you like them to share and describe this success to you, in a way that would make you think very positively about them? Would you rather hear about the work and effort they are putting into reaching their goals? Should they mention the struggles they've experienced? Or, should they rather come across as a natural succeder, as someone who just easily succeeds without having to try? Should they mention their talent and natural ability?*” *Receivers* answered the same two adapted items (e.g., “*They should...*”).

Participants also reported how relevant the scenario was for them, that is, when they were last involved in a similar situation (1 = *very long ago*, 7 = *very recently*); and how common the scenario was for them, that is, how often they found themselves in a similar situation (1 = *very rarely*, 7 = *very often*).

For exploratory reasons, I measured participants’ trait perspective-taking to examine whether sharers high in perspective-taking were more calibrated toward the preferences of the audience. *Receivers* also completed this measure to ensure that the questionnaire was equally long across conditions. More specifically, all participants responded to the 7-item perspective-taking subscale ($\alpha = .64$) of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980) in its validated Dutch version (De Corte et al., 2007).

Results and Discussion

Supporting the hypothesis, receivers preferred to hear more about the potential employee’s efforts ($M = 5.45$, $SD = 1.16$) than sharers would emphasize ($M = 4.70$, $SD = 1.41$), producing a medium effect ($d = 0.58$). The results indicated that sharers emphasized their efforts less than potential employers preferred to hear. Unexpectedly, receivers also preferred to hear more about the potential employee’s talent ($M = 5.83$, $SD = 0.94$) than

sharers would emphasize ($M = 5.50$, $SD = 1.24$), producing a small effect ($d = 0.30$), see Figure 1. Thus, sharers also emphasized their talent less than employers preferred to hear. Whereas this result was not predicted, it might stem from the job interviewer's focus on talent when making hiring decisions. Indeed, sharers as well as receivers focused on talent more than on effort, producing a medium main effect in a repeated measures design, $\eta^2 = .11$. There was a small interaction effect ($\eta^2 = .02$) of role and talent versus effort, suggesting that the stronger focus on talent was almost equally pronounced for sharers and receivers.

[Figure 1]

In a student population, being an interviewer might be less common and less relevant than being an interviewee. To control for such confounds by including these two variables as covariates, the difference between receivers and sharers in their emphasis on effort remained meaningful with a medium effect, $\eta^2 = .08$, whereas the difference between receivers and sharers in their emphasis on talent became small, $\eta^2 = .02$. Thus, the extent to which people are experienced in job interviews did not meaningfully influence the miscalibration of sharers toward receivers' preferences for effort.

On the trait measure of perspective-taking, there were only very small differences between sharers ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.52$) and receivers ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.57$), $d = 0.06$. Regarding sharers, a positive correlation between perspective-taking and their emphasis on effort as well as talent would suggest that sharers high in perspective-taking were more calibrated to the preferences of their audience (because receivers preferred both effort and talent). However, perspective-taking showed only a very small correlation with emphasis on effort, $r = .125$, and a very small correlation with emphasis on talent, $r = -.088$. These results suggest that trait differences in perspective-taking are associated little, if at all, with the extent to which people are miscalibrated to the audience's preferences for talent and effort.

Participant gender had only very small main and interaction effects on the dependent

variables, emphasis on effort (both $\eta^2 < .01$) or emphasis on talent (both $\eta^2 < .01$), respectively.

Taken together, sharers underestimated the extent to which receivers appreciated effort. Note that sharers nevertheless emphasized effort to some extents, as indicated by a mean of 4.70 (larger than the scale mid-point of 4). Of interest in this experiment was the discrepancy between sharers and receivers, instead of absolute levels of emphasis on each cause of success. Nevertheless, these results indicate that people have insight into self-presentational strategies, yet they systematically mispredict what would be optimal. In Experiment 2, I replicate these findings in a dating scenario, to test whether people's miscalibration would also occur in a setting where warmth and relatability are crucial (Cann, 2004). At first glance, it might appear that talent attributions are less relevant in a dating context. However, research on mate selection has shown that both genders value ability in their partners (Shackelford, Schmitt, & Buss, 2005). What differs is the domain in which this ability emerges. For example, women tend to value ability in men that affords social status, whereas men tend to value parenting and nurturing abilities in women. In Experiment 2, participants themselves choose the domain of their success (e.g., professional or personal success). Thus, women could imagine a personal success in their social life, whereas men could imagine a professional success. Regardless of the domain, I expect that both genders emphasize their effort less than their audiences prefer.

Experiment 2

Method

Participants. I randomly assigned 201 US-based participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 37.75$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 13.07$; 51% female) on Amazon's Mechanical Turk to a one-factor (role: sharer versus receiver) between-subjects design. Participants were paid \$0.20. Six additional participants began the experiment but stopped before responding to the dependent variable.

Procedure. Participants were asked to imagine being on a date. Aside from changing the context to a romantic setting and leaving out the writing task in the beginning for the sake of saving participants' time, Experiment 2 was identical to Experiment 1². Again, participants were assigned to the role of the sharer versus the receiver. Sharers indicated their strategy on two separate items, "*I would mention my struggles and efforts*" (1 = *definitely not*, 9 = *definitely yes*), and "*I would mention my talent and abilities*" (1 = *definitely not*, 9 = *definitely yes*). Receivers answered the same two adapted items (e.g., "*They should...*").

Next, to test whether the emphasis on effort would also appear when participants make dating decisions on a forced-choice item, sharers were asked: "*When your date considers whether they want to see you again, if they had to choose, who do you think they would prefer to see again?*" Sharers were given the choice between "*They would prefer to go on another date with me if I work hard but don't seem talented*" or "[...] *if I am talented but don't seem hard-working*". Receivers were asked: "*When considering whether to see your date again, if you had to choose, who would you prefer to see again?*". Receivers were given the choice between "*I would prefer to go on another date with someone who works hard but doesn't seem talented*" or "[...] *who is talented but doesn't seem hard-working*". Participants again reported how relevant and how common the scenario was for them.

Results and Discussion

Supporting the hypothesis, receivers preferred to hear more about the date's effort ($M = 7.36$, $SD = 1.87$) than sharers would emphasize ($M = 6.17$, $SD = 2.12$), producing a medium effect ($d = 0.60$). The results indicated that sharers emphasized their effort less than their dates preferred to hear. In contrast, receivers preferred to hear about the date's talent ($M = 6.09$, $SD = 1.97$) only slightly more than sharers would emphasize ($M = 5.69$, $SD = 2.12$),

² Note that participants responded to the dependent variable on a 7-point scale on the paper questionnaire in Experiment 1, because this seemed easier to read. In Experiments 2-3, which were conducted online, I used a more fine-grained 9-point scale for the same dependent variable.

producing a very small effect ($d = 0.20$), see Figure 2. Thus, as expected, sharers emphasized their talent almost as much as receivers preferred to hear. Both sharers and receivers focused on effort more than on talent, producing a medium main effect in a repeated measures design, $\eta^2 = .08$. There was a very small interaction effect ($\eta^2 = .02$) of role and talent versus effort, suggesting that the stronger focus on effort was almost equally pronounced for sharers and receivers.

[Figure 2]

On the choice item, the majority of receivers chose the hard-working date over the talented date (80 vs. 20). Sharers anticipated this pattern to some extent, as a majority of sharers also indicated that the date would choose them if they were hard-working rather than talented (66 vs. 35). However, sharers underestimated how clear receivers' preferences were for a hard-working date, producing a small effect ($d = 0.33$).

To control for how relevant and how common the scenario was for sharers and receivers as a potential confound, I included these two variables as covariates in the analysis. When doing so, the difference between receivers and sharers in their emphasis on effort remained meaningful with a medium effect, $\eta^2 = .08$, whereas the difference between receivers and sharers in their emphasis on talent remained negligible with a very small effect, $\eta^2 < .01$. Thus, as in Experiment 1, the extent to which people are experienced in dating did not meaningfully influence sharers' miscalibration. Participant gender had only very small main and interaction effects on the dependent variables emphasis on effort (both $\eta^2 < .01$) or emphasis on talent (both $\eta^2 < .01$), respectively.

Taken together, sharers underestimated the extent to which receivers appreciated effort. Again, sharers' mean emphasis on effort (6.17) was nevertheless greater than the scale mid-point of 5. However, this study demonstrated the same systematic difference that was found in Experiment 1 between sharers and receivers in emphasis on effort. In addition,

sharers underestimated the magnitude of the audience's preference for someone who puts in effort (as opposed to someone with talent). The question remains whether receivers prefer to hear about effort because this signals the sharer's warmth. Although this relation was suggested by the pilot experiment, Experiments 1-2 have not shown directly that receivers want to hear more about effort than sharers want to share because receivers prefer a warm counterpart. Experiment 3 tests this relation directly.

Experiment 3

Method

Participants. I randomly assigned 202 US-based participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 34.72$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.48$; 50% female) on Amazon's Mechanical Turk to a one-factor (role: sharer versus receiver) between-subjects design. Participants were paid \$0.20. Three additional participants began the experiment but stopped before responding to the dependent variable.

Procedure. Experiment 3 closely resembled Experiment 1, with several variations. Again, participants were asked to imagine being on a job interview. However, as in Experiment 2, I left out the writing task to save participants' time and used a 9-point (instead of 7-point) scale. Participants were assigned to the role of the sharer versus the receiver. Sharers indicated their strategy on two separate items, "*I would mention my struggles and efforts*" (1 = *definitely not*, 9 = *definitely yes*), and "*I would mention my talent and abilities*" (1 = *definitely not*, 9 = *definitely yes*). Receivers answered the same two adapted items (e.g., "*They should...*").

To test directly whether efforts signaled warmth in the eyes of sharers and receivers, sharers were asked, on four separate items, "*To what extent did you feel that mentioning your struggles and efforts [natural talent and ability] would signal to your potential employer that you are a warm/relatable [competent/arrogant] person?*" (1 = *not at all*, 9 = *very much*). Receivers were asked the same four adapted items, "*To what extent did you feel that*

mentioning their struggles and efforts [natural talent and ability] signaled that the potential employee is a warm/relatable [competent/arrogant] person?”. The item about arrogance was included to test whether emphasizing talent would be perceived as arrogant and would therefore be shunned by receivers. Participants did not report how relevant or how common the scenario was, because these items were uninformative in Experiments 1-2.

Results and Discussion

Supporting the hypothesis, receivers preferred to hear more about the employee's effort ($M = 6.69$, $SD = 1.84$) than sharers would emphasize ($M = 6.24$, $SD = 2.12$), producing a small effect ($d = 0.23$). The results indicated that sharers emphasized their effort less than receivers preferred to hear. In contrast, receivers preferred to hear about the employee's talent ($M = 6.17$, $SD = 1.96$) to almost similar extents as sharers would emphasize ($M = 6.49$, $SD = 2.24$), producing a very small effect ($d = 0.15$), see Figure 3. Thus, as expected, sharers emphasized their talent at similar levels as receivers preferred to hear. Unlike in Experiment 1, sharers and receivers focused on talent to similar extents as on effort, producing a very small main effect in a repeated measures design, $\eta^2 < .01$. There was again a very small interaction effect ($\eta^2 = .01$) of role and talent versus effort.

[Figure 3]

In line with the hypothesis, sharers underestimated how much emphasizing effort would lead them to be perceived as warm ($M = 6.10$, $SD = 2.04$), compared to how warm receivers would actually perceive an employee who emphasized their effort ($M = 6.52$, $SD = 1.74$), producing a small effect (standardized $B = 0.111$, $SE = 0.268$). Across sharers and receivers, emphasizing effort increased perceptions of warmth, $B = 0.659$, $SE = 0.051$, producing a large effect. When including participants' role (sharer vs. receiver), the effect of emphasizing effort on perceived warmth remained large, $B = 0.654$, $SE = 0.051$, whereas the effect of role on perceived warmth decreased, $B = 0.037$, $SE = 0.204$. These results indicate

that sharers emphasized effort to be perceived as warm, and receivers want to hear about effort because they seek warmth in an employee.

Similarly, sharers also underestimated how much emphasizing effort would lead them to be perceived as relatable ($M = 6.98$, $SD = 1.93$), compared to how relatable receivers would actually perceive an employee who emphasized their effort ($M = 7.42$, $SD = 1.58$), producing a small effect ($B = 0.124$, $SE = 0.249$). Across sharers and receivers, emphasizing effort increased perceptions of relatability, $B = 0.654$, $SE = 0.048$, producing a large effect. When including participants' role (sharer vs. receiver), the effect of emphasizing effort on perceived relatability remained large, $B = 0.648$, $SE = 0.048$, whereas the effect of role on perceived relatability decreased, $B = 0.050$, $SE = 0.191$. Thus, sharers emphasized effort also to signal relatability, and receivers wanted to hear about effort also because they wanted a relatable employee. Across roles, warmth and relatability showed a large correlation, $r = 0.636$. This indicates that participants saw a large overlap between these two traits.

A very small effect of role emerged for competence, as sharers estimated that emphasizing talent would afford them similar levels of perceived competence ($M = 6.89$, $SD = 2.03$) as receivers reported ($M = 6.52$, $SD = 1.87$), $d = 0.19$. Regarding arrogance, sharers also estimated that emphasizing talent would afford them similar levels of perceived arrogance ($M = 4.97$, $SD = 2.39$) as receivers reported ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 2.37$), $d = 0.06$. Thus, sharers did not use talent to signal competence or arrogance, and receivers did not want to hear about talent because they sought a competent or arrogant employee.

Participant gender had a very small main and interaction effects on the dependent variables emphasis on effort (both $\eta^2 < .01$) or emphasis on talent (both $\eta^2 < .01$), respectively.

Taken together, although sharers' mean emphasis on effort (6.24) was greater than the scale mid-point of 5, they nevertheless underestimated the extent to which receivers

appreciated effort.

General Discussion

When judging other people, success that results from talent signals more competence but less warmth than success that results from effort (Pilot Experiment). Yet, people seem not to fully anticipate these effects when communicating their own success. When trying to make a positive impression in a job interview (Experiments 1 and 3) and even on a date (Experiment 2), people focus less on their effort than is good for them, because audiences prefer to hear more about effort. Furthermore, people prefer to date those who struggle over those who are talented, which sharers again do not fully anticipate. These effects likely emerge because people generally prefer those who are warm (Cottrell et al., 2007), and effort conveys warmth, as my results show.

Although the effects of suboptimal self-presentation in my studies were small to intermediate (Cohen, 1988), they might be exacerbated in everyday life. In my studies, participants received the explicit instruction to maximize a positive impression and were given ample time to decide which cause for success to emphasize. In contrast, everyday life impression management situations are complex and rarely afford enough time to contemplate one's specific communication strategy. Previous literature has shown that people are especially prone to impression mismanagement under cognitive load or time pressure (Paulhus, Graf, & Van Selst, 1989). Therefore, people might mention effort even less in everyday life impression management.

My experiments use hypothetical scenarios, which can reduce external validity. However, I chose scenarios to isolate the specific effects of communicating effort versus talent, which would be more difficult to study in real-life situations with many additional confounds (e.g., differences in whether people communicate success). Furthermore, the impression management literature shows that results obtained in hypothetical settings mirror

those in field settings (Barrick, Shaffer, & DeGrassi, 2009).

How can people avoid suboptimal impression management? Experiment 1 provided suggestive evidence that perspective-taking abilities do not help. Past research has however highlighted some potential situational remedies to suboptimal impression management: Thinking of oneself abstractly (versus concretely) helps to anticipate one's public image (Eyal & Epley, 2010). Similarly, people select more favorable self-presentational strategies for (psychologically more distant) others than for themselves (White, Sutherland, & Burton, 2017). Future research should test whether increasing the psychological distance to the self can prevent miscalibration when communicating effort and talent.

In previous impression management literature, gender differences have often emerged. Specifically, women tend to downplay their accomplishments, compared to men, for fear of negative reactions (Moss-Racusin & Rudman, 2010). However, only very small gender effects emerged in my experiments. One reason for this lack of meaningful gender effects might be that I did not investigate whether participants talked about their success, but instead investigated how participants attributed their success. Meaningful gender effects might emerge in the likelihood to mention success, but not in the attribution of this success.

One might speculate which factors influence the audience's preference for effort. Research has shown that endorsing a Protestant work ethic increases preferences for hard work (Furnham, 1984). Thereby, people with a Protestant work ethic might generally prefer effortful success. Similarly, cultural differences might exist in people's preference for effort, as work ethic differences tend to map on cultural differences (Furnham et al., 1993). Thus, the preference for effortfully attained success might vary across people and cultures. All of my experiments were conducted in the United States and the Netherlands (both high in Protestant work ethic); therefore future research should investigate whether cultural differences exist in the attribution of success.

Taken together, communicating success in impression management situations seems to be a more complex task than previously thought, as different causes for this success entail different interpersonal perceptions. People intuitively anticipate such effects, but do not fully account for them when communicating their own successes. Thus, people might paradoxically undermine reaping the full interpersonal benefits of their successes.

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